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SINN FEIN.

BY SEUMAS MAC MANUS, AUTHOR OF "A LAD OF THE O'FRIELS,"
"DONEGAL FAIRY-STORIES," ETC.

VERY quietly and silently, during the past decade, a change has been coming over the face of things political in Ireland, a change of which the outside world even to-day knows little. Yet the change is one of the greatest, most revolutionizing, that Ireland has known for a century—singular, too, among changes in Ireland, and all the more powerful, perhaps, because of the grim silence in which it has been wrought. While the outside world was looking to the Irish Parliamentary Party as the guardian of the national conscience of Ireland, a Young Ireland Party, determined, virile, thoughtful, idealistic and, strange though it may seem, practical, was gradually forming, becoming a power, sweeping away outworn ideas, preaching new and putting them into practice, and working wonders in the revival of a genuine national spirit throughout the country. It was not a party formed with malice aforethought, but one called forth by the exigencies of the times; a party, consequently, that existed long without form and without name. Some of its component units had been devoting themselves to stemming the tide of emigration; some to reviving industries; a greater portion studying, and making all whom they came in contact with study, the dying language of the nation; some working along political lines; some clamoring for the rearing of forests, and still others building creameries or bringing into the country new breeds of hens—but all driving to one goal, the regeneration of the Irish nation. Naturally, and very gradually, the various units gravitated toward one another; and, less than two years ago, under the guidance of a Dublin boy named Arthur Griffith, they elected a

National Council, and formed themselves into a party known as the "Sinn Fein Party," which included probably three-fourths of the national thinkers in Ireland. Since its inception, the Sinn Fein Party has been rapidly gaining power, raising itself upon the ruins of a fast crumbling Parliamentary agitation, and eventually leaping into greater popular prestige when, recently, the ludicrous Irish Councils Bill was submitted to the nation as the fruits of a generation of Parliamentary agitation.

"*Sinn Fein*" is Gaelic for "Ourselves." The doctrine of the Sinn Fein Party is that the salvation of a nation is to be wrought out by the people and upon the soil of that nation, and it holds that "God helps those who help themselves." It asks Ireland to cultivate, what for a long time it neglected, self-reliance, and aims at regenerating the Irish nation, not merely politically, but also linguistically, industrially, educationally, morally and socially. Almost all preceding national movements made the grave mistake of considering politics coincident with patriotism; the Sinn Fein policy provides for all-round upbuilding of the nation, and is successfully working along many lines on which no political movement touched before.

I said that the new movement was rising upon the ruins of the so-called Parliamentary movement. Not merely were thinkers slowly forsaking the old methods for the new, but practically no new material whatever has been going to repair the breaches in the old; for, as the young men and women of Ireland are reaching the age at which they take thought for their country, they are falling into the ranks of the new movement. There is absolutely no accession of new blood flowing to the old movement—nor has there been for five years past.

The case made by thinking Ireland against the rapidly dissolving Irish Parliamentary Party is, not merely that they have fallen away from the ideals which they cherished, say, in Parnell's heyday, and in weak moments, for mere temporary advantage, yielded some of the principles most cherished in Ireland; that they have shown the spirit of slavish complaisance and compromise, admitted into their ranks most unworthy, un-Irish, members, totally neglected many of the noblest national interests, and in some cases, as in their attitude toward the Gaelic League, actually adopted a spirit of cloaked hostility; and in consequence of this, and many other sins, that they have become

impotent, and the mere pawns of British parties who used them when they could be useful, and brushed them aside when they were in the way—not merely that Ireland spent in London, for the support of her Members, £25,000 annually, which was badly needed to build mills and give employment and help the Gaelic revival, or otherwise forward national interest at home; but, greatest objection of all, they have, says the Sinn Fein Party, transferred the scene of struggle from its rightful and profitable place, the soil of Ireland, to its wrongful and unprofitable place, the floor of a foreign House of Parliament. It is claimed that this fighting of Ireland's fight in the Parliament of the stranger not merely weakens Ireland's political case, but demoralizes the nation by lifting her eyes and her mind from off herself, and fixing them on that foreign Parliament, leading her to believe that salvation shall, and must, come to Ireland from Westminster, instead of causing her to realize that salvation must be wrought out in Ireland by Ireland; and that the means of salvation were, all the time, lying at hand, neglected and despised.

The Parliamentary Party committed a great crime against the nation when, during the long-sustained Parliamentary agitation, they, while they had the country as a unit at their beck, never asked the country to do the things which lay at hand for its regeneration. Seeing the flower of the country depart in shiploads that darkened the seas, they never cried out, "Stick by the soil." Seeing our industries languish and die, they troubled not to revive or save them. Seeing the education of the country mismanaged, they objected not. Seeing the demon of Anglicization overrun the land, they showed not the people to cast out the demon, as easily they could. Seeing the soul of the nation passing away with the passing language, they raised no voice in protest. Yet, with wonderful and heroic energy, did they fight for some doubtful boon which was named "Home Rule"; they seemed utterly to disregard the question, whether, when (if ever) that Home Rule should be obtained, any would be left in Ireland to enjoy it, or, if any were, whether they would be Irish or merely soulless nondescripts.

In the thirty-five years during which the Home Rule Party has been busy regenerating Ireland in the British Parliament, Ireland's Gaelic speakers decreased by a third of a million, her population fell away by more than one million, we were sending

out of Ireland an annual average of £13,000,000 for foreign manufactured goods, and 980,000 acres of land went out of tillage, while we sent an annual average of 60,000 of the fittest of our boys and girls abroad to seek employment—and never to return. The two things which thrived in Ireland during the same period were paupers and taxes. In that period the paupers increased by 32,000, or one for every square mile, and British Government taxes increased from £6,900,000 to £9,700,000.

The wresting from England of a something known by the magic name of “Home Rule” was far above all other national considerations of moment, far beyond that of the people’s material and moral and national well-being. In the fierce thirty-five years’ struggle—now ended—for a parish Parliament, the petty questions of saving to Ireland the outrushing youth of Ireland, of feeding the hungry mouths that remained in Ireland, of elevating them morally, or giving them ideals, could not be tolerated to distract the people’s attention from the gladiator strife at Westminster. The people, with pathetic faithfulness to the Party, made all the sacrifices demanded,* fought the fight, bore the blows, paid the piper, and refused to do for themselves any one of the hundred things they might have done, lest such would interfere with the concentrated train of thought necessary for absent treatment—at Westminster—and, at the end of all is tendered to them the promised salvation in the form of an Irish Councils Bill, which, while it amused the giver and tickled the world at large, gave Ireland a rude awakening.

As generations of Parliamentary agitation have distinctly set back Ireland’s cause, and as there is on the English Statute-Book, still unrepealed, an Act popularly known as the Renunciation Act, passed in 1783, when the combined terrors of a war of Independence in America, and a huge army of threatening Volunteers in Ireland caused England’s heart to melt—an Act which states that the right of Ireland to be bound only by laws

* It must not be imagined that the Party had a royal time while the people were making sacrifices. To their great credit be it said that none made greater sacrifices than did the members of the Party. They never asked the people to do anything which they were not themselves prepared to lead the way in. Slander, imprisonment, police batons, overwork, ill-health—they cheerfully underwent all for sake of the cause that was near to their hearts, but which they were, unwittingly, running to ruin. I do not know any other country in which the leading political party was more upright.

enacted by the Parliament of Ireland "is hereby declared established and ascertained forever, and shall at no time hereafter be questioned or questionable," the Sinn Fein Party in Ireland, following the example so successfully set by Hungary, under Deak, call upon the Irish people to hold England bound at least by her own solemn assertions; to withdraw their representatives from illegal attendance at England's Parliament; and to establish in Ireland, for the nation's guidance, a Council of the Nation. This Council should, as far as possible, pass laws, to be put in force by Arbitration Courts (a course not unknown to Ireland), and should plan how best to uplift the nation by the nation's own efforts—to regenerate it morally, socially, educationally, agriculturally, industrially, linguistically and politically; and also plan and direct the carrying on of a resistance (both passive and active) to all British law, and, as far as possible, to all British levied taxes, an agitation aimed at harassing England, and paralyzing England's efforts at every turn in Ireland, and—by alliance with other wronged peoples, in other parts of the world—outside of Ireland, too. This new policy would be both obstructive and destructive: while the energies of some would be turned to the good work (at present going on) of depriving England's Army and Navy of the recruits whom they have so long depended upon in Ireland, others would foster new industries; others, salaried out of the £25,000 a year saved to Ireland by the withdrawal of her Members from Westminster, would act as foreign Consuls, finding foreign markets for the output of our factories; and still others would be preaching and teaching Gaelicism. No nation can persist in governing another against the will of the governed. Ireland, if she will,—and I think she will,—can make it impossible for England any longer to govern her, at least unless England concentrates upon the governing of Ireland all the energies, moral and physical, which in the natural course she needs to distribute over her vast Empire: and soon would she realize that this does not pay. The harder England pushes the fight—and at the start she will push it hard enough—the more fuel will she add to the Irish fire. Our people never develop real gusto in a fight until the hardest knocks begin coming their way; and it is certain that the easiest method of vanquishing an Irishman is to leave him severely alone.

Many sensible, earnest people will at first sight claim that the

withdrawal of the Irish Members from Westminster will be disastrous to Ireland—pointing out all the good measures that, as it seems to them, the Irish Party in Parliament have won for Ireland. The good earnest people who think so are, unfortunately, not as thoughtful as they are good and earnest. Ireland is legislated for in the British Parliament, just as the British majority desire. While the Irish representation present have but the faintest effect in modifying this legislation, and never in directing it, still the fact that they are present, that they take part in it, that they haggle for tuppence-ha’porth more value at this point, for a little less repression at that, and for permission to call their souls their own at a third point, satisfies to itself the complaisant conscience of the British Parliament, and saves its face to the world. Whereas, if the Irish representation withdrew in a body, and threw the *onus* of all Irish legislation upon the British Parliament, the latter would be left in the position of the judge, who, coming to convict, but indiscreetly provoking the counsel for the defence into throwing up the brief, found on his shoulders the *onus* of the life of the man in the dock, and was thus forced for the most selfish of reasons to fight the case for the defence himself, charge the prisoner and set him free. Furthermore, it weakens our cause when, while proclaiming that Britain has no right to govern us, we send to her Councils, every year, the picked men of our country, to aid the wronger in the doing of wrong. Finally, it is a mistake to suppose that the withdrawal of the Irish representation from Westminster would be a loss to Ireland, “because the Irish Parliamentary Party has already wrung notable concessions from Britain.” That has not yet wrung from Britain as much of a concession as would pay deck-fare for the Party between Kingstown and Holyhead. All “concessions” wrung from Britain by Ireland were wrung by the people of Ireland, struggling for Ireland, on the soil of Ireland, making it impossible, or impracticable, for the English to get along without yielding the concession. The greatest concession of the century that has passed was the Catholic Emancipation Act of ’29. And then we had an Irish Parliamentary Party of—one! It will hardly be contended that he floored the British Government—brave man though he was. After the Emancipation Act was passed, the Tithes question was the burning one of the day in Ireland. The

people of Ireland, naturally, thought it unjust that they should pay Tithes to a Church to which they did not belong. In 1831, the Tithes agitation was convulsing Ireland. Dan O'Connell, assuring the people that he would get Parliament to rectify that, appealed to the Government to suspend the collection of Tithes in Ireland pending the result of a Commission that had been appointed to inquire into the subject. Parliament laughed at Dan for his pains. To the end of a dozen blue moons, O'Connell might have agitated this question in Parliament, to the continued amusement or boredom of the House, had not the people taken a more persuasive way of reaching the ear and the heart of England, by resisting the collection of Tithes even to bloodshed. Then England at once hearkened to Ireland's voice, and sent speedy order over the land that all collecting of Tithes must be immediately stopped. At the reopening of Parliament, the King of England, for the first time, begged his faithful Lords and Commons to give careful consideration to the question of Tithes in Ireland! And a Tithes Act followed. Dan O'Connell's great and continual agitation in Ireland was successful, because it was agitation for Ireland in Ireland. It would have been more successful had he not divided the people's attention by turning their minds at the same time to the British Parliament.

The other greatest Acts of the century were the Church Disestablishment Act of '69, the Land Act of '70 and the Land Act of '81. When the two former Acts were got we had no Irish Parliamentary Party whatever; Ireland was represented only by Tories and place-hunting Whigs. In a speech in Parliament, afterwards, Gladstone confessed that it was Fenianism which caused him to disestablish the Church. And Mr. John Redmond, the present Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, confesses (in his introduction to Barry O'Brien's "Seventy Years of Irish History") that: "It was Fenianism that disestablished the Church and carried the Land Act of '70." Again, regarding the great Land Act of '81, Gladstone, in a speech after the event, said: "I am now free to confess, that if it were not for the Land League in Ireland, the Act of '81 would not be in the Statute-Book." And so, if, descending from the larger Acts, we were to examine the smaller, we should find in every instance that every concession wrung from England was wrung from her by the agitation of the people of Ireland, in Ireland, and that the se-

curing of these concessions was quite irrespective of the fact that there was or was not an Irish Party fighting for Ireland "on the floor of the British House of Commons"; and, furthermore, that the value of the concession was ever in direct proportion to the intensity of the struggle upon the soil.

There was one fight, indeed, put up for Ireland, and well and bravely put up, on "the floor of the House"—and there only. About a dozen years ago, a Royal Commission found, after exhaustive inquiry, that a paternal Government had accepted from Ireland a trifle of £250,000,000* over and above her just contribution to the Imperial purse. This fact awakened the slumbering patriotism even of the anti-Irish portion of Ireland, the Conservative, landlord and Orange classes, and both Nationalist and Conservative Irish Members of Parliament joined, for the first time, in demanding the redress of an Irish grievance in Parliament—asking that the sum unjustly taken from Ireland should be restored to her. This question was well and stubbornly fought, *in Parliament*, by a united Irish representation. Though there were many meetings on the subject in Ireland—meetings to a great extent organized and addressed by landlords and Conservatives, the titled and the well-to-do—the Financial Relations Question, as it was called, never took a hold upon the hearts of our people, and well and stubbornly though it was fought in Parliament, the Briton did not relax his grasp upon the millions which his own Commission confessed he had wrongly taken, nor yield a solitary cent in restitution. The Briton's proverbial sense of fair play, however, was exemplified in the fact that the Irish Nationalists, Unionists and Conservatives were allowed unstinted scope, and had even days set specially apart for airing the great grievance. Orating in Parliament, by the Irish Members, the Briton, on the whole, loves to encourage; it is a capital safety-valve.

The Young Ireland which has found form in the Sinn Fein Party is not a young Ireland of theory merely; it is a young Ireland of thought coupled with action. Recognizing that the language of a nation is a nation's dearest asset—the nation's soul, in fact—and seeing that its language was rapidly passing from Ireland, while as it receded a wave of Anglicization was oversweeping the land, the thoughtful ones set themselves to the

* In less than fifty years.

great, the seemingly hopeless, task of stemming this tide, and bringing back over Ireland the vanishing Gaelic tongue—knowing well that should they succeed in restoring to Ireland its tongue, with it would come all the good old Irish characteristics that the people had been fast losing, the characteristics that were their own, and that suited them, of course, far better than the characteristics natural to another very distinct people could suit them—characteristics from which, alone, their good qualities and their great qualities (if they had such) could be developed. Such was the shameful demoralization caused by Anglicizing influences in Ireland that our language, by all philologists admitted to be one of the world's rare linguistic possessions, had fallen from esteem; the well-to-do, grown English in mind, despised it, and the poor grew ashamed of it; it was practically banished from the schools, and had almost been silenced in the churches, while in the Courts of Law, poor mountain men, who knew too little English to warrant their taking oath in that language, were threatened with imprisonment for insisting upon the use of their own language. To all intents and purposes, it seemed to have become a language of the past, when the younger Ireland, taking thought, said that for the nation's salvation it must again be the language of Ireland. Twelve years ago, the language was being taught to, at most, a bare few thousand pupils, and the workers in the cause might be reckoned upon one's fingers: to-day the workers are reckoned by the thousand; between pupils of National schools, Intermediate schools, Convents and Colleges, and adults at night classes, there are a quarter of a million studying the Irish language. Irish Colleges for the teaching of pupils in Irish only, and for the training of teachers to teach Irish, have been established in the four Provinces. Many Railways and Banks have been compelled to recognize Irish: for thousands of positions to which Irish boys and girls aspire to-day, a knowledge of Irish has become an absolute necessity. Many District Councils, County Councils and some city Corporations have made it a rule that positions in their gift will not henceforth be awarded to any person who knows not his own language: scores of newspapers and periodicals give a portion of their space to the printing of Gaelic items in Gaelic type; there are some periodical publications printed entirely in Gaelic; and the output of Gaelic literature, in the form of fiction, poetry,

drama and history is great—some hundreds of thousands of Gaelic books being put forth by the press in each of these years. The Gaelic League has its network of Branches all over Ireland and in almost every corner of the world where bands of earnest Irishmen are to be found. After a hard fight with the Commissioners of so-called “National” Education in Ireland, the teaching of Irish was, in the primary schools, established on a fairly favorable basis, enabling and inducing a great portion of the teachers to teach it; and the fight for its proper recognition in the schools still goes on, and will continue until, with God’s help, it is made, as it should be, compulsory in every primary school in Ireland—made, at least, of equal importance with the English language, taught side by side, and step by step, with it. Ten years, at most, will see this latter fight fought and won; then will all the rising generation acquire the knowledge and the use of the Irish language, and in a quarter of a century from now, while a knowledge of English will still be with our people, our own language, the language that was thought dead, will once more be the language of the fireside, and—so far as it can—the language of the Church and the language of the Council and the language of our literature—the language of Ireland.

The revival of the language,—with its hundred beneficial results,—is only one of several planks in the platform of the new party. It recognizes, for instance, that a first necessity for, not merely a new and great Irish nation, but an Irish nation at all, is that the Irish people must be preserved to the nation. It recognizes that in seventy years Ireland, notwithstanding the beneficent influence of British rule, lost one-half of her population, while the small countries of the Continent, worse circumstanced than Ireland in many respects, but laboring under the blighting influence of their own rule, or, at worst, tyrannical Russian rule, have some of them increased by fifty, some by seventy and some by one hundred per cent. Emigration, of course, was the terrible drain upon Ireland. Want of employment was the root of the evil. This emigration, say the new party, must stop. Had we the right of governing ourselves, it had been an easy task to remedy it. But even without that right, say the determined young party, it can and shall be remedied by a little display of energy and of patriotism on the part of the Irish people. For the purchase of goods of foreign manufacture there is sent out

of Ireland, annually, thirteen million pounds—the greater portion of which could be kept at home, giving employment to many thousands who otherwise must go abroad to seek a livelihood. Anti-emigration and industrial movements are linked together. The industrial crusade is a live one, and one that is working wonders. In this as in other things the thinkers and workers of young Ireland do not depend upon precept alone for the instilling of their new doctrine—they practice what they preach. The thousands of workers in the Gaelic League and Sinn Fein clothe themselves from crown of head to sole of foot in articles of Irish manufacture, and use likewise, so far as possible, only Irish-made articles in their daily avocations and relaxations, even down to the matter of the match which they apply to their Irish-made pipe. The example by them set is spreading, not merely to those in sympathy with them in their political aspirations, but even to an important section of the pro-British body in Ireland, who, lacking a higher kind of patriotism, may always be reached by the patriotism of the pocket; for they, finding that their business has in many instances materially improved under the influence of the new industrial doctrine, have become convinced that it is a fine thing for Ireland, and have come to preach and practise it in their turn. The result of this particular portion of the movement is that all manufactures in Ireland have materially increased their output during the past few years. Some, notably weaving and paper-making, have doubled their output; and several new manufactures have sprung up to meet the new demands. Wages have materially increased in Ireland, employment is much more plentiful than it was and the necessity for emigrating much less. Of course, emigration has not ceased, as the necessity ceased. Let a great habit take possession of a nation, and you may not break it in a day, nor in a year, nor, maybe, in ten years. But remove the cause and, in addition, give a new mental attitude, and the habit must gradually disappear. Emigration from Ireland, on any important scale, will be, ere long, I think, a thing of the past; and immigration, which has hitherto been insignificant, will increase. I do not think this immigration will be of such notable extent as materially to affect the population figures; but, as Ireland gets more prosperous materially, brighter socially and more hopeful nationally, greater numbers of our people who have made fortunes in America will

return to settle down with us; and the coming again of these, to the home of their fathers, will have marked effect morally, if not numerically.

Still another practical work that young Ireland is and has been successfully performing, is the eradication of the drink evil. Though, as shown by statistics, and despite popular tradition, an Irishman drinks less than either the Englishman or the Scotchman, the Young Ireland Party are determined that, in the future, the Irishman's annual drink bill will not bear comparison with that of Englishman, or Scotchman, or Frenchman, or American. They hope by taking hold of the rising generation, and enlisting them in an anti-drink crusade, entirely to eradicate the drink habit here. The workers in the new movement are almost entirely non-drinkers; thousands of them have come to consider it disgraceful to enter a public house. Recognizing, too, that the treating habit in Ireland was responsible for far more drinking, and even drunkenness, than was love of drink itself, they adopted an anti-treating pledge, a pledge forbidding a man either to take a treat or give a treat, and have carried on, throughout the country, an anti-treating crusade, till now there are hundreds of thousands of people in Ireland pledged against treating, which, it is confidently believed, will fast fall into disrepute and disuse. The anti-drinking portion of the new party's programme cuts two ways: not only must it uplift the country morally and materially, but it may deprive England of a five-million-pound drink revenue, which has been annually going into the Imperial exchequer from Ireland.

The foregoing are, maybe, the more important of the many activities of the very virile Young Ireland that, pursuing the policy of Sinn Fein, is going to draw the world's attention to itself immediately. It is a more thoughtful Young Ireland, this, than any Young Ireland yet known to history. The new Party has the signal advantage over all predecessors, that it is not merely a political party: while a considerable portion of its forces carries on the war, offensive and defensive, with the enemy, another important body is nation-building, and the two bodies are capable of, and are, relieving each other. The struggle shall go on till Ireland's rights, complete, sovereign and independent, are wrung from the power that has so long held them wrongfully.

SEUMAS MAC MANUS.